

upon our navigation laws, and what course it may be-
 have us to pursue in reference to those objects which it
 professes to maintain—objects which no man can be
 more anxious to see secured than I am myself,—I
 mean the commercial greatness of the country, and
 the continuance of its military naval power. The
 Committee will perhaps allow me, in a very rapid and
 general manner, to call their attention to the
 changes that have taken place in the navigation
 laws in this country. I believe the first naviga-
 tion law which is to be found on our statute-
 book was enacted in the fifth year of the reign of
 Richard II. ; and it contains perhaps the strongest
 provisions that are to be found in the whole code.
 It enacts broadly, “ That no subject of the King
 should ship any merchandise outwards or homewards
 in any but ships of the King’s liegeance, on pain of
 forfeiting all merchandise shipped in any other ves-
 sel.” This act only lasted a single year; it was found
 necessary to alter it the next year, and foreign ships
 were allowed to be employed if English ships could
 not be procured. A few years later it was enacted
 that English ships should only have reasonable rates
 of freight; and afterwards a law was introduced to
 fix a tariff of the *maximum* of the freights to be
 charged by vessels carrying between the ports of
 England and the principal ports of the continent of
 Europe. The distinctive character of this system
 was plainly that of exclusive monopoly and restric-
 tion. It lasted, with some modifications, but with-